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IS 501 Kingdom, Church, and World

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**IS501C: Christian Formation
Kingdom, Church, and World
Spring 2006
Wednesdays, 9:00-11:45am**

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:15—3:30pm, Wednesday, 1:00-2:00pm
And by appointment**

Introduction and Course Description: Welcome to Kingdom, Church, and World, one of the two “Core Formation” courses in Asbury’s curriculum. Most Christians have some taken-for-granted understandings of each of the words in the title, but at the start of a seminary career and in preparation for ministry, a richer understanding of each of these key themes is crucial. This course provides an opportunity to examine our presuppositions and commitments regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God and its relationship to the church and the world. Thus we will be asking and attempting to answer some very basic questions: what is the Kingdom of God? What is the church? How does and how should the church engage the world? What do we mean when we speak of the “world”? We will address many additional questions because this introductory class attempts to open up topics in theology, biblical studies, ecclesiology, ethics, philosophy and mission—topics you will consider in depth as you move forward in your seminary studies.

Course Rationale: This course is shaped by two over-arching concerns. First, an essential skill for all persons engaged in Christian ministry is the ability to “think theologically.” This means more than being able to provide proof texts from Scripture for a particular position. It involves grasping the biblical message as a whole and developing a way of interpreting our contemporary situation in light of the biblical story. Second, to grasp the biblical message in a holistic fashion, it is helpful to see the Scriptures as organized around certain integrative motifs, and the three around which we have chosen to build the course are central to Scripture.

In this course we will explore what constitutes a biblical narrative and the role narrative plays in the Scriptures. We will reflect on the role of culture in shaping our understandings of mission and ministry. In addition, we will consider how the biblical story subverts our familiar ways of thinking, being, and acting in the world. Our end goal is to understand more fully who we are as the people of God and what it means to be in God’s service in the world as representatives of God’s kingdom.

The overall vision for this course and for the reading assignments has been shaped by a group of faculty members committed to working together and sharing resources.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, students should be able to:

1. Articulate their understanding of the biblical narrative that comes to focus for us best in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God;

2. Identify the particular contribution of the Wesleyan tradition to our understanding of this narrative;
3. Draw out major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this narrative, especially as these are related to the nature and mission of the people of God;
4. Evaluate cultural products (e.g., literature, television, movies, advertisements, print media, music) in light of major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this narrative;
5. Exercise criticism with respect to one's own cultural context and discernment with respect to the context of others vis-à-vis major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this narrative;
6. Articulate the ecclesial and missional implications of this narrative—specifically for one's own context and generally for our shared global context; and
7. Exhibit a heightened sense of commitment to serving the kingdom of God in mission in the world.

Required Reading:

Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Plantinga, Cornelius, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.

Snyder, Howard A., *Kingdom, Church, and World: Biblical Themes for Today*, Wipf and Stock, 1985, 2001.

Volf, Miroslav and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Walker, Andrew, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture*, Wipf and Stock, 1996, 2003.

Wright, N.T., *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, InterVarsity Press, 1999.

“IS501 Course Packet for Small Groups” available at Cokesbury.

Recommended Reading:

Hart, Trevor, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology*. InterVarsity, 1995.

Hauerwas, Stanley and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Abingdon, 1989.

McLaren, Brian, *A New Kind of Christian*, Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Evaluation:

- **Active and Substantive Participation in Small Groups (10 points)**
The small group will meet every Wednesday during class for reflection and discussion of the small group material. Each person in the group is expected to lead the group's work twice during the semester.
- **One Page Book Evaluations and Reading Record (10 points)**
Each student will turn in a one-page single spaced reflection paper for the following books: *Truth is Stranger than It Used to Be*, *The Challenge of Jesus*, *Telling the Story*, and *Kingdom, Church and World*. Papers are due as noted on the syllabus. Instructions for these papers: 1. Give a one-sentence statement of what the book is about. 2. Write a short paragraph describing the author's main argument. 3. Briefly explain how the book relates to the course objectives. 4. Identify one key insight you learned from this book. 5. What question or issue are you struggling with as a result of reading the book? 6. Note two consequences or implications for ministry that you gained from reading the book.

Students are also expected to maintain a weekly record of readings, to be handed in at the end of the semester.

- **Kingdom Project and Presentation (10 points)**
Each student in the small group is required to spend 12 hours of personal work/involvement in a "Kingdom Project." This project is a group effort that must be completed together. In order to facilitate this project, a list of local ministries and resources will be provided. However, groups are also encouraged to find other suitable (in consultation with professor) churches, para-church organizations, social service agencies, and community related organizations where they may complete the Kingdom Project. After completion of the Kingdom Project, each group will share its experience with the class.
- **Kingdom Project Reflection (written—10 points)**
Each member of each group will write a personal reflection on his/her experience in the project in the light of class readings and lectures. The goal of this paper is to integrate your experience of doing the Kingdom Project with the theological reading and work done in class. Please write no less than three and no more than five pages, using 12-point type. Use one-inch margins on all sides and true double-spacing. Any paper receiving less than 5 points can be rewritten as instructed by the professor.
- **Mid-term Exam (30 points)**
Take-home, open book exam
- **Final Exam (30 points)**
During exam week. Essay questions will be distributed in advance.

Grading: Work for IS501 will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level. The grading scale is as follows

A	= 94-100	Exceptional Work
A-	= 90-93	
B+	= 87-89	
B	= 83-86	Good Work
B-	= 80-82	
C+	= 77-79	
C	= 73-76	Acceptable Work
C-	= 70-72	
D+	= 67-69	
D	= 63-66	Marginal Work
D-	= 60-62	
F	= 59 and below	Failing Work

Incomplete Work: “A grade of ‘I’ denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an *unavoidable emergency*, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment. If the work of the course is incomplete at the end of a term without an emergency, a letter grade will be given based on the grades of work done, with incomplete work counted as ‘F.’ ” From ATS 2003-05 Catalog, page 28 (emphasis added).

Attendance Policy: One week of class may be missed without makeup. After one week, extra reading is required (50 pages per day missed: from the recommended reading list) and a one page single-spaced paper summarizing the extra reading. If three weeks are missed, a conversation with the professors is needed and there will be a reduction of grade. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the attendance sheet is marked prior to leaving class. Any questions arising should be addressed to the professor immediately and should not be left until the end of the semester.

Teaching Intern: Darlene Hyatt will be assisting in various aspects of this course.

Small Groups: In the first week of class you will be assigned to a small group. This group will be an essential part of the class. These five people will: (1) share in a “Wesley-type” accountability group, (2) discuss small group reading material, and (3) work together on a Kingdom Project.

The purpose of small groups in KCW is to provide formation in the Wesleyan tradition of nurture and accountability and to be a place where academic discussion and growth in spiritual disciplines mutually inform each other and contribute to how we manifest a kingdom witness in the Church and in the world.

Guidelines for Group Meetings:

1. Because Christian living and witness are important aspects of this course, the group experience is built into our weekly class time so that no one has to find time for an additional meeting outside of class.
2. The purpose of this group is to hold each other accountable for growth in grace, to share insights from the weekly disciplines, and to encourage each other toward living faithfully as witnesses to the kingdom and the lordship of Christ in our lives.

3. One student in each group will take attendance weekly and email it to Christine_Pohl@asburyseminary.edu. Please note that if you miss more than three sessions (for whatever reasons), you will not receive credit for this component of the course.
4. Each person should complete all assigned readings before coming to class.
5. Each group should covenant to keep group conversations confidential.

Course Schedule

Introduction

February 8: General Overview and Organization of the Course

Review Course Objectives and Procedures
 Class Reflection on Central Themes
 Small Groups: Selection, Process, Leadership, and Expectations

Module 1: Understanding Our World: Description and Diagnosis

Whatever happened to sin? Whatever happened to truth?
From modernity to postmodernity?
The stories of our culture

February 15: Culture and Cultures

Readings due: Plantinga, ix-95; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 2)

February 22: The World and Sin

Readings due: Plantinga, 96-199; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 3)

March 1: The World and the People of God

Readings due: Middleton & Walsh, 4-84; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 4)

Module 2: Telling the Church's Story

Understanding the biblical meta-narrative; Taking a fresh look at Jesus
Wesleyan contributions

March 8: The Biblical Story: The Old Testament

Readings due: Middleton & Walsh, 85-195;
 See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 5)
 Assignment due March 8: One page reflection paper on Middleton & Walsh

March 15: The Biblical Story: The New Testament

Readings due: Wright, 9-95; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 6)

March 22: The New Testament and the Church

Readings due: Wright, 96-197; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 7)

Assignment due March 22: One page reflection paper on Wright

Assignment due **March 27**: Take-home midterm

March 29: Wesleyan Contributions to the Church's Story

Readings due: Walker, xi-100; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 8)

April 3-7: Reading Week**Module 3: Living the Kingdom**

Kingdom, Church and World: Drawing the Themes Together
Living Our Theology

April 12: Kingdom Concerns and Contemporary Life

Readings due: Walker, 101-201; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 9)

Assignment due April 12: One page reflection paper on Walker

April 19: Kingdom Concerns and Contemporary Life, continued

Readings due: Snyder, 9-120; See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups (Week 10)

Assignment due April 19: One page reflection paper on Snyder

April 26: No Class; use class time for completing Kingdom Projects

Readings due: Selections from Volf and Bass

May 3: Practices and the Kingdom, and Kingdom Project Presentations

Readings due: Selections from Volf and Bass

Assignment due May 3: Class presentations on Kingdom Project

May 10: Practices and the Kingdom; Conclusion

Readings due: See Weekly Guide for KCW Small Groups

Assignment due May 10: Kingdom Project Reflection paper

May 15-19: Exam Week. Final exam due date as assigned by registrar